

Conflict Coaching: When Mediation Isn't A Possibility

Conflict Coaching is becoming a larger and larger part of my practice. One of the many applications: Coaching one party in a dispute is a great Plan B when only one party is willing to come to the table.



Ideally, mediators would like to sit down with both (or all if there are more than two) parties in a dispute and do what we are trained to do: facilitate discussion, define the issues, guide the process to the transformative “Ah-Ha” moment, hammer away at the solutions and craft an agreement that everyone feels good about and to which all the parties can adhere. But what happens when despite the mediators best efforts to convene a case, only one party is interested in coming to the table? There is still hope for a peaceful process, and I have found that conflict coaching can be really effective in these situations.

WHERE TO BEGIN:

I start these kinds of sessions helping my client identify their own conflict resolution style. Are you an Accommodator? Is Avoidance most comfortable for you? Are you Confrontational, Compromising, Collaborative? What are the strengths and weakness of each of those styles? Can they be combined with a style that is more effective? Are there some gaps in your tool kit?

LEARNING SOME TOOLS:

Next we address some basic communication tools for successful dispute resolution: Listening Skills, I Statements, Effective and Productive Questioning, Neutral Language and more. At this point, role-playing is one good way to assess the skill level of my clients and how well they understand and can incorporate what may be new concepts for them.

ADDRESSING THE CONFLICT:

Now that I have a basic understanding of my client's style and skill level, and he or she has a basic understanding of the concepts of alternative dispute resolution, it's time to work on managing the conflict itself. Like a mediation session, this is done through identifying and discussing the issues, uncovering the underlying feelings, problem solving, brainstorming alternatives, exploring options for resolution, developing language to address the other party, role-playing and a trunk full of other facilitation tools available to a mediator. Since the “other” party is missing, we try to construct possible reactions and outcomes and work with “if-then” strategies.

Conflict coaching is proving to be a very successful tool in preserving relations, helping resolve conflict and de-escalating difficult situations. It is often chock full of “Aha” moments and all of my clients find that there is usually a bonus. Aside from having a positive impact on an existing conflict, the process is empowering and gives them additional life skills to resolve and sometimes avoid future conflicts.

Biography

Barb North of Win Win Training and Mediation has worked as a mediator, conflict coach and negotiator for over fifteen years, and has designed and delivered more than 2,500 trainings in such areas as Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Communications Skills, Acting, Couples Communication, Improvisational Theater, Speaker's Skills and Stand-Up Comedy. She has written and produced corporate training films, led seminars, retreats and facilitated group discussions.

A keynote speaker and guest on such television shows as NBC's "The Other Half", Adelphia Cable's "Conflict Line," Barb is particularly skilled at working one-on-one with parties in conflict. She also has extensive experience facilitating multi-party conflicts, working with group conflict, and helping resolve conflict in organizations. Her sensitivity to the human issues and her ability to aid in communication between parties and help people in conflict to explore their options in a cooperative environment has created success in resolving a large percentage of disputes. Barb's strength is her combined ability to work as a neutral facilitator in resolving current conflicts and as a trainer/system designer to help manage and avert future conflicts.

Email Author barb@comedynorth.com

Website: www.winwintraining.com